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Important NDBC Web Site Changes

Dial-A-Buoy is working, but occasionally requires the phone to ring six or seven rings before answering. We're working on the solution to this technical difficulty. Sorry for the inconvenience.

Dial-A-Buoy Introduction

What is Dial-A-Buoy?

NDBC, a part of the National Weather Service (NWS), created Dial-A-Buoy to give mariners an easy way to obtain the reports via a cell phone. Dial-A-Buoy provides wind and wave measurements taken within the last hour at the NDBC buoy and Coastal-Marine Automated Network (C-MAN) stations. The stations operated by the National Data Buoy Center are located in the Atlantic, Pacific, Gulf of Mexico, and the Great Lakes. Since Dial-A-Buoy was initially established, the feature has been expanded to include stations owned and operated by other organizations including the United Kingdom Met Office and Environment Canada.

Large numbers of boaters use the observations, in combination with forecasts, to make decisions on whether it is safe to venture out. Some even claim that the reports have saved lives. Surfers use the reports to see if wave conditions are, or will soon be, promising. Many of these boaters and surfers live well inland, and knowing the conditions has saved them many wasted trips to the coast.

An increasingly popular way to obtain the observations has been through the Internet. In fact, NDBC's web site has received more than a million hits a month. "Dial-A-Buoy is a logical extension to the Internet," states NDBC's David Gilhousen. "It will allow the mariner a way to get the conditions while offshore, at the marina, or away from the Internet."

Buoy reports include wind direction, speed, gust, significant wave height, swell and wind-wave heights and periods, air temperature, water temperature, and sea level pressure. Some buoys report wave directions. All C-MAN stations report the winds, air temperature, and pressure; some also report wave information, water temperature, visibility, and dew point.

How do I use Dial-A-Buoy?

To access Dial-A-Buoy, dial (228) 688-1948 using any touch tone or cell phone. Assuming you know the identifier of the station whose report you need, enter 1. Then, enter the five-digit (or character) station identifier, followed by the # sign, in response to the prompt. The system will ask you to confirm that your entry was correct by pressing 1. After a few seconds, you will hear the latest buoy or C-MAN observation read via computer- generated voice. Characters are entered simply by pressing the key containing the character. For Q, press "7", and for Z, press "9". Please be patient and wait for the system to finish prompting you; Dial-A-Buoy will not understand your entry if you are too fast.

Dial-A-Buoy also can read the latest NWS marine forecast for most station locations. If this option is available, the system will prompt you to press the # key after the observation is read. Wait to hear the tone at the end of the prompt before pressing the # key.

When you are finished with Dial-A-Buoy, simply hang-up!

There are several ways to find the station locations and identifiers. For Internet users, maps showing buoy locations are given at http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/ . Telephone users can enter a latitude and longitude and receive the closest station locations and identifiers.

How Does Dial-A-Buoy Work?

The Dial-A-Buoy system does not actually dial into a buoy or C-MAN station. The phone calls are answered by a computer at the Stennis Space Center in Mississippi, where NDBC is located. The computer runs currently available software to control the dialog and read the forecasts and observations from NDBC's web site.

What are some problems with Dial-A-Buoy?

I entered a station identifier, but heard a response "Sorry, I did not recognize that selection." You entered the station identifier too soon. Wait until the system finishes asking you for the identifier.

How do I enter characters for a Station Identifier? Characters are entered simply by pressing the key containing the character. For Q, press "7", and for Z, presses "9". For example, to enter CHLV2, press the keys 24582 followed by the # sign.

I entered a valid station identifier, but heard a response saying that the topic was unavailable after about 6 second delay. Occasionally, the Internet gets very busy here at Stennis Space Center. The Web-On-Call software, which runs Dial-A-Buoy, has been programmed to give this response if it cannot obtain our web page to read in about 5 seconds. So, unfortunately, the answer is: Try again later.

I pressed the pound sign to get a marine forecast but heard the response, "Sorry I did not recognize that selection." You entered the pound sign too early. Wait until you hear a tone to press the pound sign.

How do I quit Dial-A-Buoy? Simply hang-up.

How do I hear the observations for another station? When you are finished hearing the observations or forecasts, the system will begin a long prompt saying, "To listen to this topic again, press 1....." If you press 6 at this point, Dial-A-Buoy will take you back to the beginning of the dialog.